

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL DURBAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2044

INFO AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

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E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: PINS, ELAB, SF

SUBJ: VIOLENCE ABATES IN NEWCASTLE BUT ECONOMIC
IMPACT CONTINUES

REF: DURBAN 336 AND PREVIOUS

1. BEGIN SUMMARY

FOLLOWING FOUR DAYS OF VIOLENCE (REFTELS) RESULTING IN TWO DEATHS AND FORTY ARRESTS, NEWCASTLE IS RELATIVELY QUIET ONCE AGAIN. HOWEVER, AFRICAN TOWNSHIP RESIDENTS HAVE ENTHUSIASTICALLY ENDORSED BUS BOYCOTT, REQUIRING SOME TO WALK UP TO TWENTY-FIVE KILOMETERS TO WORK AND BACK. COST TO LOCAL INDUSTRY NOT YET MEASURED BUT BELIEVED HIGH. WHILE IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF CONFLICT IS INCREASE IN BUS FARES, MOST OBSERVERS REGARD LOW WAGES AND DIFFICULTIES OF APARTHEID-IMPOSED TOWNSHIP LIVING AS UNDERLYING CAUSES OF UNREST.
END SUMMARY

2. FOLLOWING FOUR DAYS OF CONFLICT OVER INCREASED BUS FARES UNCLASSIFIED

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FOR AFRICAN LABORERS DURING WHICH, ACCORDING POLICE, FORTY

PERSONS DETAINED AND TWO KILLED, NEWCASTLE'S TWO LARGE AFRICAN TOWNSHIPS HAVE NOW EXPERIENCED FOURTH DAY OF RELATIVE CALM. PLICE CONTINUE TO PATROL STREETS AND BUSES ARE RUNNING ONCE MORE--ALBEIT UNDER PLICE ESCORT AND EITHER EMPTY OR WITH ONLY VERY FEW PASSENGERS AS MOST AFRICANS CONTINUE TO BOYCOTT BUSES. IN ONE TOWNSHIP (OSIZWENI) RESIDENTS ORGANIZED 150-MAN VIGILANTE COMMITTEE TO PATROL TOWNSHIP TO REDUCE LOOTING.

3. PRESS HAS REPORTED KILOMETER-LONG STREAM OF AFRICANS WALKING TO AND FROM WORK IN PREST OVER TWENTY PER CENT INCREASE IN BUS FARES. ACCORDING VARIOUS ACCOUNTS, BOYCOTT ENTHUSIASTICALLY ENDORSED BY MADADENI RESIDENTS AT MASS MEETING IN TOWNSHIP OCTOBER 5. CHAIRMAN OF TOWNSHIP COUNCIL (DR. FRANK MDLALOSE) EMPHASIZED WORKERS WERE NOT STRIKING BUT ONLY BOYCOTTING BUS SYSTEM AND URGED NEWCASTLE EMPLOYERS TO PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION FOR THEIR EMPLOYEES, STRESSING THAT FARE FOR BUS SERVICE FROM MADADENI TO NEWCASTLE HAD RISEN FROM EIGHT CENTS S.A. IN MARCH 1974 TO TWENTY-FIVE CENTS IN JUNE 1975 AND NOW TO THIRTY CENTS. HE ALSO CHARGED BUS COMPANY HAD RENEGED ON AN AGREEMENT TO POSTPONE FARE INCREASES UNTIL OCTOBER 15. DURING MEETING RESIDENTS DEMANDED BANTU INVESTMENT CORPORATION WITHDRAW BUS SERVICE AND THAT PUTCO, A PRIVATE BUS FIRM, OR THE SOUTH AFRICAN RAILWAYS OPERATE COMMUTING SERVICE.

4. WHILE MOST TOWNSHIP RESIDENTS NOW ARE WALKING TO WORK--MADADENI IS TWELVE KILOMETERS FROM NEWCASTLE AND OSIZWENI TWENTY-FIVE--SOME DO OWN AUTOMOBILES AND HAVE FORMED CAR POOLS; ADDITIONALLY, AFRICAN TAXIS NORMALLY SERVING TWO TOWNSHIPS ARE RUNNING ALL-DAY SHUTTLE SERVICE FOR TWENTY CENT FARE EACH WAY. IN APPARENT ATTEMPT TO BREAK BOYCOTT, POLICE EVINCED SUDDEN CONCERN FOR ROAD SAFETY AND IMPOUNDED NUMEROUS VEHICLES AS "UNROADWORTHY" OR CHARGED DRIVERS WITH TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS.

5. COMMENT: WHILE PROXIMATE CAUSE OF CONFLICT IS TWENTY PER CENT INCREASE IN BUS FARES, MOST OBSERVERS, JOURNALISTS AND ACADEMICS, NOT SURPRISINGLY LOOK TO POVERTY AND APARTHEID AS ROOT CAUSES. SPOT SURVEY OF WAGES BY NATAL MERCURY FOUND UNCLASSIFIED

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SALARIES RANGING FROM R72 TO R124 PER MONTH. (MERCURY ESTIMATES POVERTY DATUM LINE CLOSE TO R120). TRANSPORTATION COST IS SENSITIVE ITEM IN AFRICANS' BUDGETS FOR TWO REASONS: 1) LOW INCOMES OF MOST AFRICAN LABORERS MAKE ANY ADDITIONAL EXPENSE, NO MATTER HOW MARGINAL, CAUSE FOR CONSTERNATION, AND 2) TRANSPORTATION IS HIGHLY INELASTIC FACTOR SINCE AFRICANS CANNOT CUT DOWN ON CONSUMPTION THIS SERVICE TO COMPENSATE FOR ITS INCREASED COST. ALTERNATIVE OF REDUCING CON-

SUMPTION OF OTHER COMMODITIES, E.G. FOOD, CLOTHING, INCREASES
HARDSHIP AND THEREFORE RESENTMENT PROPORTIONALLY.

6. OTHER AUTHORITIES, SUCH AS PROFESSOR LAWRENCE SCHLEMMER,
DIRECTOR UNIVERSITY OF NATAL INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH,
PLACE BLAME ON TENSIONS OF TOWNSHIP LIVING. SCHLEMMER NOTES
TOWNSHIP LIVING REQUIRES RESIDENTS TO LEAVE HOMES FOR WORK
EARLY IN MORNING AND RETURN LATE IN EVENING, MAKING WORKERS
"MORE ACCIDENT PRONE, MORE VINDICTIVE AND MORE RESENTFUL."
(WHITES IN DURBAN, FOR EXAMPLE, TYPICALLY HAVE TWICE AS MUCH
LEISURE TIME AS BLACKS.) COMPOUNDING SITUATION IS CROWDED
AND DISORGANIZED CONDITION CHARACTERIZING BLACK TRANSPORTATION
FACILITIES WHICH ADDS FURTHER TENSION TO AFRICANS' DAILY LIVES.

7. ACCORDING PRESS REPORTS, MANY NEWCASTLE FIRMS ARE OPERAT-
ING AT LESS THAN FULL CAPACITY WITH REDUCED STAFFS. COSTS OF
CONFLICT IN TERMS OF LOST PRODUCTION PREMATURE TO ESTIMATE,
BUT PROBABLY QUITE HIGH. DESPITE REDUCTION OF VIOLENCE AND
RETURN OF MOST WORKERS TO THEIR JOBS, CONTINUING BUS BOYCOTT
WILL BE COSTLY TO NEWCASTLE EMPLOYERS--PROBABLY MORE COSTLY
THAN INCREASED SUBVENTIONS TO BUS COMPANY TO HOLD DOWN FARES.
IN TELLING OBSERVATION FRANCIS TRICKEY, PRESIDENT NEWCASTLE
CHAMBER OF INDUSTRIES, ARTICULATED WORRYING CONSIDERATION
FOR EMPLOYERS THAT NO WORKER CAN BE PRODUCTIVE WHEN HE WALKS
TWENTY-FIVE KILOMETERS A DAY. IN REAL SENSE THESE COSTS, AS
WELL AS COSTS OF LENGTHY TRANSPORTATION OF WORKERS, ARE
DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO APARTHEID POLICY SINCE AT TIME NEWCASTLE
DESIGNATED INDUSTRIAL GROWTH POINT, SAG, IN CONFORMANCE
WITH GROUP AREAS ACT, LOCATED TOWNSHIPS UP TO 25 KILOMETERS
AWAY FROM CITY AND ITS INDUSTRIES. BY THIS CONSCIOUS DECISION
SAG MADE LABORERS CAPTIVES OF BUS SERVICE AND THUS CREATED
PRESENT SITUATION.

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